

## DEMOCRACY. NUANCED & NOT

# 2177 11 Sept 87

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Yesterday, on the six-language walking news conference aboard his flight to Miami, the pope said, in the context of the question regarding massive Am. Cath. disagreement from him on divorce & contraception, that the Church is not "democratic" but "theocratic": public opinion does not run the Church. This got me to thinking about the range within "democracy," all the way from public opinion, the simple, literal, unnuanced meaning (demo-cracy, "people-power") to Stalinist Leninism with its eschatological-idealist newspeak (the people to rule directly when the pre-communist state, having achieved communism, withers away). The underlying burden of this Thinksheet is (1) my conviction that "democracy" as an unnuanced slogan impedes the advance of democracy as the optimizing of people power (people optimally participating in the decisions affecting their lives) & (2) my prayer that the churches, distancing themselves from this counterproductive sloganizing, will promote, in each situation local & larger, that governmental design which best approximates fairness & freedom ("with liberty & justice for all")--the design I here call "nuanced democracy." Within the limits of history, I consider this design, & only it, "theocratic," the precursor of the fullcome Kingdom-Reign of God.

1. The Catholic Church IS a democracy, a simple, one-man-one vote democracy. In papal elections, every cardinal can vote, and each cardinal's vote has equal weight with that of every other cardinal. Here the Church is an unnuanced, literal, democracy.

2. Unnuanced, plain-&-simple democracy is possible only in parvo, in the case of small & egalitarian bodies. (The biblical bio-family does not qualify. It's a small body, but--being patriarchal--is not egalitarian. The biblical universe twice fails to qualify: it's not small, and--being patriarchal--is not egalitarian. My second example is more than impish; it implies the question of the metaphysical-theological grounding of democracy.)

3. Because unnuanced democracy is a possibility only in the case of small & egalitarian bodies, democracy cannot logically be considered the ideal form of human government in general. The illusion that democracy (in the simple sense) IS generalizable throughout human institutions is self-defeating, others-abusing, pernicious. Yet it's the cry of outsider demagogues on both right & left.

4. But it's possible to design simple democracy into larger societies --which is my definition of "nuanced democracy." Our Constitutional Convention 2 centuries ago did it, pressured as were those 55 men to (1) maximize liberty, freedom, their substantive principle, (2) within an order which, while honoring the substantive principle, would assure tranquility as (a) the womb of prosperity & (b) the sword & shield against internal tyranny & external threat--this particular nuanced, fine-tuned order being their operant principle. The literalist notion that what the Founding Fathers came up with is exportable is at best naive & at worst cultural-imperialist & might be dubbed fundamentalist foreign policy, though at various levels of sophistication. What is exportable, indeed what we Americans should be missionary about, is the two principles. (A Roman Catholic parallel: Present dissident theologians are making much of the ethico-legal Church history distinguishing principles, which give continuity, & their applications, which change with the particularities & vicissitudes of time & place.)

5. A multilevel or storied, vertical system of direct democracies such as ours--called here "nuanced democracy"--is usu. called "a republic." Might this style of statecraft be useful in the RCC, using the pyramid's apex (papal elections) as model for the lower levels? Archbishops would elect cardinals; bishops, archbishops; priests, bishops;

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local communicants (the parish), deacons (including the permanent diaconate) & priests (this last being, historically, the Protestant "congregational polity")? To increase democracy in the Church, some theologians are advocating the election of bishops by the communicants of each particular diocese. Perhaps such a change, or any on the same principle, should be called, if adopted, "modified authoritarian" rather than "nuanced democratic."

6. Designations such as "modified authoritarian" & "nuanced democratic" (1) point to realities & (2) describe what the designator perceives categorially when viewing a political entity. While (1) is objective, it cannot be done verbally without adding the subjectivity of (2). It is a primary task of "critical consciousness" to distinguish (2) from (1). The distinction is no more optional than that between principle & application: some unnecessary distinctions deserve to be called "hair-splitting," but only anti-intellectuals & obscurantists would so call necessary distinctions. (Yes, "un/necessary" here is not free from subjectivity!) Which brings us to....

7....hindrances to designing nuanced democracies in church & state: (1) The language problem described immediately above (sec.6)....(2) Personal investment of insiders in the present arrangements, the status quo. ... (3) The momentum, throughout the present system (leaders & followers), of emotion-laden traditions for the familiar & thus against innovation....(4) Ideology,\* the skeleton of the present system's flesh....(5) Fallen humanity's inclination to extremism, which has the advantage of combining the ego's joy in speaking in a loud voice with intellectual laziness & promotional simplism (from anarchism's maximizing of freedom to totalitarianism's maximizing of order)....(6) In those professionally interested in government, the occupational hazard of overrating the importance of political power in comparison with (eg) justice, peace, creativity, love, material prosperity; my power is apt to concern & involve me more than does either your power or our power...\*An intellectual politicization of an imaginal (not imaginary!) commitment. Eg, Puritanism; eg, Pastor Jn. Robinson's church: he surrendered his Anglican ordination, & let his congregation deny him the privilege of boarding the Mayflower (they voted him to say with those unable to travel).

8. When cooler heads prevail on both sides, Israel will nuance its democracy (1) to enfranchise the non-Jews in the so-called Occupied Territories (2) without losing its character & constitution as a Jewish though secular state.

9. Is the USA "a Christian country"? Of course, & of course not. Its secular Constitution rests on religious foundations, and those foundations are overwhelmingly Christian. "Pluralism" meant that the founding culture, which was almost exclusively Anglo &, except for Maryland, almost exclusively Protestant, was an open "melting pot" to receive immigrants of other cultures: secular-revisionist "pluralism" means the equality of spiritual-cultural traditions, an ideology requiring religious-moral relativism, which accordingly is now pushed in our public schools. The public school is, & will continue long to be, the hot focus of the debate as to what America is & what America should be & how to educate the young & to what ends.

10. May South Africa nuance its democracy (1) to enfranchise all the rest of the non-whites (2) without sacrificing its character as a European (English & Dutch) state, the only one in all of Africa. Can the whites become (like the pope among the bishops) *primi inter pares*, the first among equals? Must the outcome be zero-sum (first become last, instead of remaining in some new, fairer sense first, as have the 3% whites in Zimbabwe)? Down with ideological generalizations!